INDO-ARYAN RELIGION IN ACHAEMENID PERSIA

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IN
ACHAEMENID-PERSIA

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
(May 1970)

MASTER OF ARTS (1970)
(Religion)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Indo-Aryan Religion in Achaemenid-Persia

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NUMBER OF PAGES: vii, 87

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A historical investigation of the religious legacy within a single dynasty that belonged to a branch of the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-Aryan culture - Achaemenid-Persia (550-330 B.C.). In the course of our investigation we shall note that three distinct Indo-Aryan religious "threads" co-existed in Achaemenid-Persia - the "Magian-Medes," the "Achaemenid-Persians" and the "Zarathustrians."

PREFACE

The religious situation under the Achaemenid-Persian dynasty (550 - 330 B.C.) has been a matter of endless and tedious controversy. In the heat of the debate the pendulum has swung to both extremes: those who, chiefly basing their emphasis on the evidence of the Old Persian inscriptions, regard the religion of the Achaemenid kings, at least from Darius to Artaxerxes I, as "true" Zarathustrians; and those who oppose this view, basing their evidence on Herodotus' writings, arguing ingeniously that his views reflect proto-Aryan nature worship, or ancient Indo-Iranian religious beliefs and practices.

The scope and purpose of this thesis will not be either to affirm or to deny any one of the positions just stated, since modern scholarship has enough supporters of each view. Rather, this thesis will approach the matter from a different perspective.

It will make a modest attempt to demonstrate that at least three contemporaneous Indo-Aryan religious "patterns" co-existed during the Achaemenid-Persian dynasty.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genesis of this thesis goes back to the year 1967-68, when my interest in this field was stimulated during my final year in the undergraduate course of ancient Near Eastern history, taught by the late Professor J. Macpherson, of the University of Toronto. The following year, having enrolled in a graduate seminar on the Archaeology of Western Asia, I had the privilege of studying under the able direction of the archaeologist, Professor T.C.Young, Jr., of the Royal Ontario Museum, to whom I desire to express my thanks for his learned and acute suggestions in our conversations with refernce to the Achaemenian religion.

It would be unprofitable to apologize for the shortcomings of this thesis, which experts are apt to detect all too easily. And while any errors and demerits must be solely my own responsibility, yet I wish to record my indebtedness to my three

supervising Professors: to Professor J.G.Arapura, chairman, for his unfailing courtesy and constant encouragement; to Professor Yün-Hua Jan, for granting me the benefit of his discerning criticism; and to Professor E.P.Sanders, for his valuable literary advice and for his painstaking work of proof-reading.

This opportunity cannot be passed without expressing my thanks to Professor R.M.Smith, of the University of Toronto, who so kindly read the manuscript and made suggestions for its improvement.

Unquestionably, without the courage and sacrificial fortitude of my loyal spouse, my academic endeavors would have been simply impossible. And so, above all, this thesis is dedicated to my wife and our two children, not as a matter of sentimentalism, but out of a deep sense of gratitude and affection to them.

C O N T E N T S

	Page
PREFACE	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
I PRE-ZARATHUSTRIAN RELIGION	5
1. The Pantheon	
2. Myths and Beliefs	
3. The Cultus: Practice & Clergy	
II ZARATHUSTRA AND HIS MESSAGE	27
III THREE INDO-ARYAN RELIGIONS	45
1. The Old Persian Inscriptions	
2. The Writings of Herodotus	
Map of Achaemenid world	85
Bibliography	86

ABBREVIATIONS

AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures.
AV	Avesta
GK	Greek
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
OP	Old Persian
RV	Rig Veda
Y	Yasna

INTRODUCTION

In the course of its long history, Persia was to emerge as the heir of one of the great religions of the ancient world - Zoroastrianism. But Zoroastrianism as preached by the reformer-prophet Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism as the national religion of the final phase of pre-Islamic ancient Persia (Sassanid Persia) were two different things.

The history of pre-Islamic Persia (Iran) falls roughly into the following five periods:

715(?)- 550 B.C.		The Medes
550	- 330 B.C.	The Achaemenids
330	- 247(?)B.C.	Hellenistic Intermezzo(Seleucids)
247	- 227(?)A.D.	The Arsacids (Parthians)
227	- 651 A.D.	The Sassanids

Zarathustra (628 - 551 B.C.), whom the Greeks called Ζωροαστρης, lived during the Median power, and tried not only to reform the Indo-Iranian religious legacy

of polytheism, but preached strongly, as a prophet, his doctrine of ethical dualism. With his mono-theistic tendency and his teaching of ethical dualism, he was bound to effect - for good or bad - the religious order of his day. Now since the Achaemenids are usually refered to as the founders of the ancient Persian empire, and since the influence of Zarathustra would be visible during and after his death, we shall limit the scope of our thesis by investigating the Indo-Aryan religious trend(s) in Achaemenid-Persia.

To do this, we shall examine first the pre-Zarathustrian religion - that is, the religious cultus and practices, the myths and beliefs, as well as the pantheon in the days before Zarathustra came and proclaimed his message. In the course of our investigation we shall note that the Iranians had inherited a religious legacy that belonged to the Indo-Aryan group. From this same group the Indians had also inherited their religious character. What then are some of the Avestan and Vedic relationships in regards to their religious heritage?

Our next step will be to investigate Zarathustra and his message. Who was Zarathustra?

Where and when was he born? What was his message and what effect, if any, did it have? These are some of the problematic questions that will be looked into as we examine our sources of information in order to assess Zarathustra and his message.

Finally, after briefly tracing the historical background of the Achaemenids we shall plunge into the controversial subject - the religion in Achaemenid Persia. Western scholars have hitherto adhered to two schools of thought: those who by taking for granted the identity of Vishtaspa as the father of Darius, and the protector of Zarathustra, insist that the Achaemenian kings were "true" Zarathustrians; and those who do not see any evidence of this and therefore oppose the view. Naturally, both schools have used the same two main sources - the Persian inscriptions and the Greek authors, mainly Herodotus, since he was contemporary with the Achemenian period - as evidence of their views. We too, of course, have to examine these two most important sources in the light of recent archaeological evidence.

Interestingly enough, Herododtus' writings

will reveal to us something of which, I beleive, he himself was not completely aware, though he does distinguish at least the different burial customs of the Magi(Median-Persians) and the Achaemenid-Persians. Similarly the Old Persian inscriptions will reveal to us Indo-Iranian deities as well as Zarathustra's own deity Ahura Mazdah. Can we then see three "threads" of Indo-Aryan religions?

In the course of such an investigation, we shall note that the Median-Persians, the immediate predecessors of the Achaemenids, had inherited, like the Achaemenids, the Indo-Aryan polytheistic religious legacy; but in due time they had molded their own religious identity and pattern as distinct from that of the Achaemenid-Persians. Naturally, with the Achaemenids in political power, the Median-Persian religion would be somewhat agitated. But upon the scene had come, during the same historical period, one called Zarathustra, whose reform and teachings must have shocked as well as attracted people. Now three distinct religious "movements" were in the atmosphere - the Median-Persian, the Achaemenid-Persian, and the Zarathustrian.

CHAPTER ONE

PRE-ZARATHUSTRIAN RELIGION

Both the Medes and the Persians, called Iranians, are among the several groups whose language shows features characteristic of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. They entered the Iranian plateau, and the adjacent territories, in the course of several centuries and in subsequent waves - approximately from 1400 B.C. to 1000 B.C.[1] The first to make an impact on the west were the Medes. Established in the north-west of the Iranian plateau, they swooped down upon the Mesopotamian plain and extinguished forever the Assyrian power.[2] Nevertheless,

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1. For the disputed subject of the Indo-Europeans and the coming of the Aryan-Iranians, compare, P.Thieme, "Indo-European Language" in American Scientific, Oct./58, p.63-74; G.Roux, Ancient Iraq, p.202-207; C.G.Cameron, History of Early Iran, p.1-21 & 138-155; R.Ghirshman, Iran, p.73-89.
2. For the historical relations of Assyria and Media, see G. Roux, Ancient Iraq, p.266-305 & 338-348; R.Ghirshman, Iran, p.90-118; R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.92-102.

their (Median) dynasty, founded by Deioxes, came to an end in 550 B.C., when Cyrus revolted against the Median king Astyages. The outcome was the establishment of the Achaemenid-Persian empire.

In the course of its long history, Persia was to emerge as the heir of one of the great religions of the world - Zoroastrianism. But Zoroastrianism as preached by its founder Zarathustra and Zoroastriansim as the national religion of Sassanid-Persia were two different things. Before discussing the question of Zarathustra, a few general remarks about the Indo-Aryan legacy may be helpful.

1. The Pantheon

The relationship between the Iranians and the Indians shows greater affinities than between any other two Indo-European families of languages. Both people, of course, are referred by the term "Aryan", and many of their religious and social concepts seem to stem from a common origin.[1]

The earliest evidence, outside India, in which Indo-Iranian divinities are mentioned is the famous

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1. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.37-47

inscription found in the village of Boghazköy (Anatolia) which celebrates the conclusion of a treaty between the Hittite ruler Suppiluliuma and the Mitanni king Mattiwaza, about the fourteenth century B.C. Here we meet five Aryan divinities: Mitra, Varuna, Indra, and the two Nāsatyas.[1] It was Dumezil who first pointed out the similarity in the Vedic pantheon (RV 10.125.1bc) in which these same divinities appear side by side and in the same order.[2] Thieme, in his article, answers two questions which he himself raises: "Do Mitra, Varuna, Indra and the two Nāsatyas protect treaties in the Rig Veda? and: Is it likely or probable that they did so in Proto-Aryan times?"[3] He demonstrates that all the named gods indeed are said to protect treaties in the Rig Veda, and that only one name in the Mitanni list can be postulated safely as that of a Proto-Aryan god whose function it was to protect treaties: Mitra, meaning "Contract, Treaty." All the other

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1. For further description of these five divinities, see, Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre, p.47-57; P.Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80: 1960, vol.4, p.301-317.
2. G.Dumezil, Les dieux des Indo-Europeens, p.9f; cf. P. Thieme, JAOS, for linguistic differences between the Akkadian inscription and the Vedic verse.
3. P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80: 1960, vol.4, p.301-317.

names of the list are doubtful with respect to the form of the name or to the function of the god in Proto-Aryan times.[1]

Whether these divinities were Proto-Aryan or not, for us the importance is that they played a role within the Aryan pantheon. Mitra was the "god Contract," who, when named, caused people to make "mutual arrangements." In the Avesta (Y.10) he is depicted as the protector of those that are faithful to their contracts, and as the enemy to those who "belie" their contract. Varuna, in the Vedic pantheon, is the "lord of oath," one who "watbhes over solemn engagements and obligations." He is usually associated with Mitra, who together (Mitra-Varuna) "induce people to make agreements and preserve peace."[2] The Avesta on the other hand has no trace of a god Varuna, but instead, Mithra appears, on several occasions, coupled with Ahura: Ahura-Mithra, or Mithra-Ahura.[3] The "communis opinio" regarding the Vedic Mitra-Varuna and the Avestan Mithra-Ahura, especially Varuna/Ahura

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1. P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80: 1960, vol.4, p.315-316.
2. Ibid. p.307-308
3. Ibid. p.308

relationship, is well stated by Zaehner:

> From this brief comparison between the two gods it seems clear that Varuna of the Rig-Veda and the Ahura Mazdah of the Gatha of the Seven Chapters are the Indian and the Iranian derivatives of one and the same god. Both are intimately associated with Truth (asha/rta), with the Kingdom or sovereignty (khshathra/kshatra), with the waters which in both traditions are likened to milch-cows or are his wives, with mysterious power (màyā), and finally with light and sun. Both are so intimately connected with Mitra/Mithra that we find the two names coupled in a single compound in the dual number, Mitra-varuna in India, Mithra-ahura or Ahura-Mithra in Iran. 1

The Rig Veda however, knows a god "Asura" distinguished from, though occasionally working with, Mitra-varuna; and Thieme feels that this vedic "Asura" points to a Proto-Aryan god which was replaced later by Ahura in the Iranian Avesta and by Varuna in the Indian Rig Veda.[2]

Indra is the god whom people call for help when fighting so as to lead them to victory. But he is also recognized, in the Rig Veda, as the one who

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1. R. C. Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.68.
2. P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80:1960, vol.4 p.309.

wreaks vengence upon those who do not recognize the sacredness of contracts or treaties.[1] The functions of Indra and Varuna seem essentially similar: both of them punish those who "sin" against (or break) their contract treaty. But Mitra protects those that are faithful.

What about the Avestan Mithra? Can he be identified with the Vedic Mitra? "It has long been maintained," says Zaehner, "and with justice, that many of Mithra's more sinister attributes, so seemingly at variance with his true nature, are attested of the Vedic Indra, not the Vedic Mitra."[2] And he goes on to add that the Avestan Mithra and Verethraghna perform functions that are characteristic of the war-god Indra in the Rig Veda.[3] Thieme however tends to differ again. Rather than seeing Avestic Mithra and Verethraghna (who are "ahuras") resembling Indra (who is a deva), he sees the Avestan god Verethraghna only "in his role as the fighting companion of Mithra, as the equivalent of the Vedic

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1. P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80: 1960, vol.4, p.310.
2. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.102f.
3. Ibid. p.104

Indra in his role as the helper of the Adityas."[1] But this does not necessarily mean, he goes on to say, that Verethraghna has taken the place of Proto-Aryan Indra, but possibly the reverse. That is to say, that the Avestan Mithra and Verethraghna have preserved Proto-Aryan ideas.

The two Nāsatyas, or "Asvins" as they are more usually called in the Rig Veda, are often referred as "divine physicians" or "gods of healing;" but their role as "helpers" too may involve fighting, which would have an ethical motivation.[2]

The Vedic pantheon is generally divided between the "asura" gods and the "deva" gods. Of the five mentioned divinities in the Mitanni inscription, Mitra and Varuna are predominantly "asuras," while Indra and to a lesser degree the Nâsatyas are essentially "devas." Most probably in Iran also these two types of deity must have existed: the "ahura" gods and the "deva" gods. Yet, whereas the Rig Veda recognizes the "asura" deities as directly

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1. P. Thieme, "The Aryan Gods in the Mitanni Treaties," JAOS, 80:1960, vol.4, p.311-312.
2. Ibid. p.314.

concerned with the right ordering of the cosmos, and the "deva" deities as associated actively with men, the Gathas[1] on the other hand, are silent about the "ahura" deities,[2] and consider the "daeva" deities not gods but maleficent demons.[3] Further evidence is supplied both by the opposition of Zarathustra, in the Gathas, against the kavayas (wise ones) and the karapans (sacrificial priests),[4] and by the inscription of Xerxes who attacks the "daeva" worshippers and destroys their sanctuaries.[5] More shall be said later about this inscription.

Outside the Mitanni inscriptions we meet a few other divinities that must have been part of the Indo-Aryan traditional pantheon. Vayu (Vedic Vayu) the god of "wind" was probably in origin not an "ahura" but a "daeva," who later in the Avesta was neatly bisected: the good "Vayu" who protects the creatures of Ahura Mazdah, and the evil "Vayu" who is little better than a demon of death. His fate is

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1. The name of the sacred writing attributed to Zarathustra.
2. Except Ahura Mazdah; cf. Y.30.9 and 31.4 where "Ahuras" are in the plural.
3. See Y.32 and Y.51.
4. See Y.32 and Y.51
5. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.151 (XPh lines 35-41).

transformed again into the "Void" during the Sassanian period.[1]

2. Myths and Beliefs

Both India and Iran have inherited from the Aryan legacy a number of myths and beliefs. One of the important mythical personalities, because he is concerned with the origin and destiny of the human race, and because Zarathustra blames him, is "Yima." The Vedic "Yama" (Av. Yima), who is the son of Vavasvant (Av. Vivahvant) the Shining One, appears as the solar deity who willingly gave up immortality in order to conquer death and to lead mortal men after him, on the "path of Yama," through death to immortality.[2] He is thus identified as the first man, who lays aside his immortality of his own free will, passes through the valley of death in order that he may once again join the immortals.[3] In later literature he is not only the god who brings death,

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1. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.98.
2. For a fuller description of "Yama/Yimm" see: J. Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre, p.30-43; R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.132f.
3. cf. Phil.2:5-11 for similarity of idea re Christ.

but also the ruler of the land of the blessed dead.

The mass of legend that has woven itself around the Iranian "Yima" illustrates the tension between two opposed traditions, but also proves the Indo-Iranian antiquity of this figure. The Avestan "Yima" is a split personality. According to the one tradition, "Yima" is the son of Vivahvant, who like his Vedic counterpart, is a god of the sun. He is also first man and first king, and the human race is thought of as deriving from the sun. He ruled for a thousand years (Y.9.10; 17.30) in which he "deprived the daevas of wealth and prosperity . . . and during his reign there was neither cold nor heat, old age nor death, nor yet disease created by the daevas."[1] The golden age however, could not last forever, and the Wise Lord warned him to retreat underground as humanity was to be afflicted by winter. There he would remain, together with his elect, until the signs foreshadowing the last days appear - the worst being a winter more terrible than any the

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1. See Y.19.32-33.

world had ever seen. Then he would re-emerge and re-populate the devastated earth.[1]

According to Zarathustra, however, "Yima" was a "sinner" who forfeited his own immortality and the immortality of all his seed. "Among those sinners," says Zarathustra, "we know, is Yima, son of Vivahvant, who to please our people made them eat of the flesh of the ox."[2] That it is a traditional religion that Zarathustra is attacking is made quite clear by the fact that it is "Yima" whom he singles out for special abuse. Yima must have been regarded by the Iranian priests as the institutor of the bull-sacrifice, which was believed to bring about bodily immortality; that is, those who consumed the flesh given them by Yima became immortal in body. That this sacrifice took place after dark, or in a sunless place, seems to be implied by Zarathustra's condemnation of those who say that the sun and the ox are the worst things the eye can see.[3]

Both the Gathas and the Rig Veda have preserved much of the Indo-Iranian religious concepts.

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1. Is there here possibly a version of the "deluge?"
2. See Y.32.8
3. See Y.32.10

Perhaps the first in importance was "Asha" (Order, Truth), the Vedic "Rta" who was associated with Varuna as the "protector of Rta."[1] That this concept comes from the Indo-Iranian times is attested not only by Indian and Iranian evidences, but also from the El Amarna tablets, by the usage of the term in the names of Aryan chieftains of Mitanni, Syria and Palestine around 1400 B.C., and later among the Medes and Persians.[2] The principle which violated "Order" (natural or moral) was "Disorder" or "Druj."[3] Zarathustra, who later based his ethical dualism on these existing religious concepts, describes himself as a true ehemy of the follower of the "Druj"(Dregvan), and a powerful supporter of the follower of "Asha" (Ashavan).[4] These concepts of "Order" and "Disorder" belonged to the realm of nature as well as to that of cultic rites and moral law. "This I ask thee, O Lord," says Zarathustra, "answer me truly: Who was the first father of Asha (Truth,Order,Righteousness) at the birth?"[5]

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1. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.48; J.Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre,p.58
2. J.Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre, p.58-59
3. Refered also as the "Lie" or "Wicked"; see R.C. Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism,p.36
4. See Y.43.8
5. See Y.44.3

In another passage we read, "Then spoke the Wise Lord himself, he who understands the prayers in his soul: 'No master has been found, no judge according to Asha!..."[1] Thus "Asha/Rta" played an important role in the "theological" concept of the Indo-Iranians.

Another ancient concept, which Zarathustra seems to have formulated in accordance to his own ideology, was the myth of the twin "Mainyu": Spenta Mainyu ("Holy", "Bounteous," or "Good Spirit") versus Angra Mainyu ("Destructive" or "Evil Spirit" - the later Ahriman).[2] These two stood over against each other: the one, the bringer of life, was good and gave abundance, the other, the author of death, was evil, destructive, and chose to do the worst things. Later Zoroastrianism (after the prophet's death) formed a closed heptad system of the so-called "Amesha Spentas" (Bounteous Immortals), and Ahura Mazdah came to be identified with Spenta

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1. See Y.44.3
2. See Y.30.3-6 and Y.45.2. I, for one do not believe that the myth of the twin Mainyu was original to Zarathustra; and it is futile to look around for origin, since concepts of "good" and "evil" spirits are common to almost all religions. Zarathustra utilized these concepts for the purpose of his own ethical dualism.

Mainyu. Zarathustra, (in Y.30.3-6) assumes the twin Mainyu at the origin, one good, the other evil, in thought, speech, and deed, between whom - and this is Zarathustra's original idea - man's choice must be made! This idea of "choice" or "free will" is the invention of Zarathustra, and we shall have to say more about this in chapter two. "When these two spirits came together in the beginning, they established life and non-life,"[1] and apportioned to the righteous and to the wicked their respective destinies: on the one side, good, intelligence, and life; on the other, evil, foolishness, and non-life.

Before proceeding to consider the cultic rites and practices of ancient Iran, a few words may be helpful in regards to certain traditional terms that must have been important in all phases of the pre-Zarathustrian paganistic religious life. The Gathas give us an insight both into the extent of Zarathustra's reform as well as into the traditional religion. Equivalents of religious concepts are

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1. See Y.30.4

to be found in the Rig Veda. We have seen that "Asha" corresponded with the Vedic "Rta." Now we meet a few other terms: "Khshatra," Vedic "Kshatra," meaning the "kingdom" with which Varuna was particularly associated. "Aramaiti," the Vedic "Aramati," meaning "right-mindedness," "humility," or even "devotion." Again, we see "Ameretat," the Vedic "Amrta," meaning "immortality." "Haurvatat," the Vedic "Sarvatat" meaning "wholeness" or physical health.

Thus, Zarathustra was not working in a religious vacuum, but having inherited these traditional materials, he adapted, elevated, and even transformed them. This, of course, does not belittle his achievement, which, as we shall see, was quite radical, especially when seen against a polytheistic background. But we must also realize that this background was far beyond the primitive beliefs concerned with nature; rather it is a milieu concerned not only with cosmological but ethical conditions as well. However, we should look briefly into the cultic practices to help us with observations on the pre-Zarathustrian religion.

3. The Cultus: Practice & Clergy

At least three forms of sacrifice were parcticed before Zarathustra's time, since the prophet condemns two of these forms while the third seems to be acceptable to him. These were: the "animal" sacrifice, the "drink" (haoma) sacrifice, and the "fire" (atar) sacrifice.

The animal sacrifice and the cult of the haoma plant seem to be combined, practiced by the worshippers of "daeva" deities, and probably at one time, by the worshippers of the "ahura" deities as well. This cult must have been an unseemly and orgiastic affair, since the slaying of the bull, or ox, was accompanied by shouts of joy, and Zarathustra condemns the filthy, literally urine, drunkenness of the priests, and their attempt in deceiving the people.[1] The author of the cult was, going back to the beginning of time, Vivah-vant, whom we have seen was originally a sun-good. In return for his institution of the rite of the god-plant haoma (Vedic Soma), he was granted a son whose name was Yima.[2] Yima, according to pre-Zarathustrian

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1. See Y.48.10
2. See Y. 9.4-5

legend that we saw, had a golden reign of one thousand years in which all men were immortal and enjoyed perpetual youth.[1] But Yima sinned and men lost their immortality. Consequently, Yima added the sacrificial immolation of a sacred bull, to banish from the world disease, old age, and death.

Whether Zarathustra was opposed to the ritual as such, or only to the form of the ritual, is a matter of one's own interpretation and need not detain us here.[2] What is clear, however, is that from time immemorial this cult had become the central sacrement of the Iranian religion. The traditional cult consisted of the slaughtering of an ox, accompanied by another rite in which the juice of the haoma plant was extracted and ritually consumed. This juice must have been fermented and was certainly intoxicating. Godbey tells us that the Indian "soma" was the juice of either a certain milkweed, or the bruised green leaves of hemp.

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1. See Y.9.10
2. Zaehner thinks that Zarathustra did not condemn the ritual, but some peculiar combined form of it: "a bull sacrifice in which the plant appeared to have been burnt." See R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.85-86

"Among the Iranic peoples," he goes on to say,however, "this haoma seems to have been 'bhang' or Indian hemp, for Herodotus (IV.75) tells us that the Iranic Scythians, who broke into Asia Minor (around Jeremiah's time) burned Indian hemp in their religious exercises, until bystanders were intoxicated with their fumes."[1]

The cult of fire, both in Iran and in India, did not seem to play as major a role as that of haoma/soma. Even the term which designated fire differed one from another: Avestan "atar," while the Vedic is "agni." That the rite of sacred fire existed before Zarathustra is seen by his adoption of it and by his making it the outward symbol of "Asha," Truth.[2] In fact, Zarathustra made the "fire" the centre of his cultus[3] because in its power "to destroy darkness it is the symbol of Truth itself whose brilliance too destroys the darkness of error."[4] Furthermore, all humanity will be judged by an ordeal of "blazing fire and molten metal," and everyone will

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1. A.H.Godbey, "Incense & Poison Ordeals in the Ancient Orient," AJSL, 46: 1930, p.221.
2. See Y.43.4.
3. See Y.43.9
4. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.47f.

be alloted his eternal destiny of happiness or woe.[1]

Lastly, a few general remarks in regard to the Indo-Iranian religious leaders, or priests. Two different names are mentioned by Zarathustra as being his opponents: the "kavis" and the "karapans." On the other hand, he calls himself a "zaotar," the Vedic "hotar" meaning priest. None of the terms indicate any clear meaning. Generally, it has been assumed that the word "karapan" means "mumbler," presumably a reference, to the recitation of a traditional liturgy.[2] Whatever the term "kavi" meant, Zarathustra used the word not only to denote the leaders of his opponents, but also as an epithet of his own patron Vishtaspa. In India the word means, according to Zaehner, "a composer of hymns."[3] But in the Iranian traditions it must have had a different meaning, since in the later Avesta the word is used to mean "ruler" or "king," and is regularly applied to the legendary

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1. See Y.51.9
2. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.37.
3. Ibid. p. 37; but also compare Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre, p.29: "La terme du kavi...signifie dans l'Inde 'sage, voyant, barde, prophète.'"

kings of Iran. The result of the study of this word led Frye to make the following remarks:

> The word 'kavi' is found in India as the priest who is a seer, conversant with magic, or one who is initiated into mysteries, also a sage or poet. In Iran the name is applied in the Avesta to eight rulers in the dynasty in order, Kavata, Apivahu, Usadan, Arshan, Pishinah, Byarshan, Syavarshan and Hausravah, all with the title Kavi prefixed to their names. Then comes Kavi Vishtaspa, not mentioned with the others but rather as one 'kavi' among many. Furthermore, he is the last ruler to bear the title in all of our sources. Contemporary with Vishtaspa are other 'kavis,' opponents of Zoroaster, and since they are always linked with the 'karapans' or mumblers, other priests who opposed the prophet, one could assume then that the 'kavis' were some kind of 'priest-kings' of eastern Iran, who upheld the ancient Aryan rites and practices. [1]

Whatever then the etymology of the word, kavis as well as karapans and zaotars existed before Zarathustra.

Before we close this section, something should also be said about the "magi." There are few subjects

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1. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.60; for various Vedic terms and Iranian cognates, one should read : J. Gonda, The Vision of the Vedic Poets; as for the term and function of the "kavi", see especially pages 36-57, and 335-337.

on which scholars have differed as widely as on the origin and function of the magi. The differences in opinion are due chiefly to the varying degree of interpretation given to the accounts in the Greek sources - mainly Herodotus. Furthermore, the origin of the word itself is unknown, and Frye says that no satisfactory etymology for the word has been found.[1]

The magi were well known not only to the Iranians - Medes and Persians - but to the Greeks as well. Herodotus tells us that the "magi" were one of the six tribes of the Medes and were influential in the Median court as advisers and interpreters of dreams; that they acted as priests during the sacrifices offered by the Persians, and that they openly practiced the slaying of noxious beasts and the exposure of the dead.[2] Of course we shall have more to say in chapter three about the Magis and their socio-political, and/or religio-political role during the Achaemenid dynasty, when we deal with the problems of reconciling the

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1. See R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.100; Frye is also aware of the etymologies as summarized by E.Benveniste, Les Mages dans L'ancien Iran, p.20.

2. Herodotus notes further the differences in burial customs between Persians and the Magians. See Herodotus I.101, 107, 132, 140.

picture from the Classical sources, the Old Persian, and the archaeological sources. What is of importance to note here for us is the recognition of a group called the "Magi" who joined five other tribes to form the political coalition called the "Medes." That this so called "Magi" tribe or group existed before the establishment of the Median-Persian empire is attested not only by Herodotus, but,as we shall see, by Darius in his famous inscriptions of Behistun.

Such then was the religious panorama within the Indo-Iranian legacy when Zarathustra appeared on the scene. The political force of power in ancient Persia was at its crucial point of shift - from the Medes to the Achaemenids. At the same time the religious forces were facing a challenge by one who was to become the founder of a once great Eastern religion.

CHAPTER TWO

ZARATHUSTRA AND HIS MESSAGE

At the end of the eighteenth century, through the efforts of the Frenchman Anquetil du Perron, who studied the sacred texts preserved by the Parsi communities in Bombay and other parts of Northwest India, the "Avesta" became known to the Western world.

The "Avesta" is the sacred book (strictly speaking the only sacred book) of Zoroastrian belief. It consists of ancient sacred writings composed and written over a period of 1000 years - the earliest portion being composed before the reign of Darius (521 - 485 B.C.), while the Pahlavi texts date during and after Sassanid Persian period (226 - 651 A.D.). According to tradition, a vast literature once existed under the heading of the "Avesta," but today only a small portion survives. The three principal groups of writings that can be distinguished within

the Avesta are:

1. The Yasna - This is a collection of formulas of prayer and liturgy; and also a group of hymns, or songs, within it, called the "Gathas," which are considered to be the work of Zarathustra himself; plus a section sandwiched between the Gathas, written in the same dialect as the Gathas but very different in theological context, known as the Haptanhaiti Gatha (Gatha of the Seven Chapters).[1]

2. The Yasht - A collection of sacrificial hymns addressed to individual deities.

3. The Videvdat - Less correctly known as the Vendidad, literally means "law (dat) against (vi) the demons (dev)" and is concerned largely with ritual purification.

Of the seventy-two chapters to which the Yasna is divided, chapters 28-34, and 43-53 are known as the Gathas of Zarathustra. The intervening chapters - chp.35-42 - form the so-called Gathas of the Seven Chapters. Linguistically, a distinction is commonly made between the language of the Gathas

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1. There is also a separate liturgical work called the "Vispered."

and the rest of the Avesta. The former known as the "Gathic" - the language of a presumably more ancient character - and the latter as "Younger Avestan." Scholars have indicated the linguistic and historical affinity between the Gathas and the Rig Vedas - the collection of sacred texts of ancient India, and the oldest known documents in Sanskrit - to such an extent that the assumption of a common cultural and linguistic origin is generally accepted.[1]

What about the date and authorship of the Gathas? Although the generally accepted view is that the Gathas represent the words of Zarathustra, yet the opinions of the Avestan scholars differ widely. Some feel that Zarathustra composed and wrote the Gathas around the seventh or sixth century B.C.; others think that the Gathas were composed in the main by him, but occasional verses were later added by his disciples. Frye suggests that the Gathas, although composed by the prophet Zarathustra, were preserved by memory for centuries before being written down. Be that as it may, the general view is that the

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1. Bode & Nanavutty, Songs of Zarathustra, p.26f.
2. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.49

Gathas are the only authentic documents, outside of tradition, on the life and teachings of the prophet Zarathustra.

In our survey of pre-Zarathustrian religion, we have already encountered Zarathustra and some of the reform he attempted to bring. But who was Zarathustra? Where and when was he born, and what was his message?

According to Eastern Iranian tradition, Zarathustra was the prophet of ancient Iran who lived in the seventh to sixth century B.C.[1] His birthplace was Azerbaijan, north-west of Media. His father Pourushaspa, came from the family of the Spitamas, and his mother Drughdhova, came from the clan of the Hvogvas. Of his mother it is said that at the age of fifteen she conceived and gave virgin birth to the prophet. Furthermore, the accounts of the prophet's infancy and later life abound with miracles. His real mission started at the age of thirty, and after ten years he was successful in converting king Vishtaspa

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1. For traditional story see: A.V.Jackson, Zoroaster

(father of Darius I ?) and the court in Bactria. His missionary labors were strengthened at the King's conversion, and his organized campaigns for propagating the faith led him as far as China. At the age of seventy-seven he died a violent death, while praying in a "fire-temple," leaving behind him sons and daughters.

Modern Western scholarship, on the other hand, tends to differ.[1] Some have even doubted the real existence of the prophet, and felt that he was only created to match prophets in other religions.[2] Others have tried to group the evidence of the Gathas and the Greek sources with later Zoroastrian traditions, and Islamic sources, and have come to various speculative conclusions. Why all this confusion? Because despite the painstaking research in the field of Iranian religious literature, archaeology, ethnology, philology and history, there is still hardly any positive evidence on his life. Even the Gathas - presumably

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1. For various views one should read: W.B.H. Henning, Zoroaster:Politician or Witch Doctor; J. Duchesne-Guillemin, The Western Response to Zoroaster; R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism.

2. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.49 finds these arguments unacceptable.

written by Zarathustra - are silent in regards to his time and place of birth.

The precise date given by the Islamic author Al-Biruni places Zarathustra "258 years before Alexander."[1] Now there is no reason to doubt this; and in fact we can go a step further and interpret more precisely: "before Alexander" could have signified nothing else to the Iranians than the sack of Persepolis, the extinction of the Achaemenid empire, and the death of their last "king of kings," Darius III. This occured in 330 B.C., and Zarathustra' s date would then be 588 B.C. If we may take this date to refer to the conversion of Vishtaspa when Zarathsutra was forty years old, and furthermore, if we accept the traditional account that the prophet was seventy-seven years old when he died, then the best theory for his dates would be 628 - 551 B.C.[2]

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1. A.V.Jackson, Zoroaster, p.157. The Classical sources place Zarathustra "6000 years before Plato;" for refuting this view see E.Benveniste, The Persian Religion, p.15f, and R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.50

2. This is the date acceptable to both R.C. Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.33, and R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.50f. However, some favor the traditional date as suggested by E.W.West: 660-583 B.C. O.Klina in "The Date of Zoroaster," Archiv Orientalni, 27:1958, p.564, proposes: 784-707 B.C. E.Herzfeld in "The Iranian Religion at the time of Darius & Xerxes," Religions, 15, p.20, suggests: 550-480 B.C.

The birthplace of Zarathustra is also a controversial subject, which by no means has been resolved. Even the classical sources (Greek and Latin) are divided in their opinion as to the homeland of the prophet.[1] Some, such as Cephalion, Eusebius and Justin, believed it was Bactria and the east. Others, such as Pliny and Origen, suggest Media and the west. The oriental sources, such as Bundahishn, and the Islamic authors, such as Shahrastani and Tabari, all imply that the prophet's birthplace was western Iran. Frye demonstrated that there are at least three items of evidence which would tend to place the prophet in eastern Iran: the legends and stories regarding the prophet's activities seem to be more specific when localized in the east; the language of the Gathas seem to blend into the linguistic features of the eastern Iranian sagas; and, finally, the names of the family and relatives of the prophet are in general "what one would expect in ancient, eastern Iran."[2]

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1. A.V.Jackson, Zoroaster, p.157f.
2. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.52-54.

What about Zarathustra's teachings? In what way did his message differ from ancient beliefs and customs? Zarathustra was a "zaotar"[1] (priest) who lived in eastern Iran around the middle of the seventh century B.C., amidst the traditional pantheistic religion. He had witnessed the religious corruption of his day, and was deeply offended by the base practices of the false "prophets" who not only distorted the "sacred scriptures," but through their evil doctrines diverted men from the best course of action and the divine purpose in life.[2] Without doubt, such were the followers of the "druj"[3] and Zarathustra openly condemned them as the "beloved of the Daevas, and obstructors of the Good Mind," departing from the divine purpose of Ahura Mazda and from his law.[4] That such an announcement would bring him into sharp conflict with the sacrificial priests of the "daevas" (karapans), he knew very well; yet in the face of persecution, he spoke courageously against the "kavayas" and the "karapans," calling them "wilfully blind" and"wilfully deaf," who

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1. See Y.33.6
2. See Y.32.9-12
3. See Y.32.11
4. See Y.32.4

hinder the "cultivation, peace and perfection of Creation through their own deeds and doctrines."[1]

Perhaps to everyone's astonishment, Zarathustra pronounced the epithet to the practice of the "haoma" ritual: "duraosha," that is, death-dispelling, said he, as he watched the sacrificial priests intoxicated by the excessive use of the juice of the sacred plant of haoma.[2] This vigorous radical preaching must have earned him the enmity of many; since his reform must have involved for the sacrificial priests the loss of their income and their lifework, besides all the rest.

Against a pantheon of deities, some benevolent, others malevolent, Zarathustra held the supremacy of his god Ahura Mazda. Ahura Mazda, the "lord of life and wisdom,"[3] was the "first and also the last for all eternity."[4] He was the mighty and holy, the creator of all, giver of all good, and the giver of life.[5] To those who looked up to Ahura Mazda with awe, to them

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1. See Y.51.14
2. See Y.48.10
3. See Y.43.16
4. See Y.31.8
5. See Y.43.4; 44.7; 48.3; 50.11

he was a "friend, brother, nay father!"[1] Because his god was "holy, eternal, just, omniscient, the primeval being, creator of all and the origin of all goodness," Zarathustra chose Ahura Mazda "alone as master."[2] Hence the tendency towards monotheism ascribed to Zarathustra.

Zaehner feels safe at this point to say that "a god called simply Ahura, the Lord, existed before Zoroaster's time ... and that Zoroaster took over this god Ahura, the Lord, and filled out his personality by adding the epithet mazdah to his name..."[3] Duchesne-Guillemin however, after a lengthy discussion, comes to a different conclusion: "Il est probable qu'une religion du grand dieu Ahura Mazdāh existait en Iran avant Zarathustra."[4] That the term "ahura" was pre-Zarathustrian, we have seen; and I suspect no one would deny that. But that the term "Mazda" as applied to Ahura (the Lord) was pre-Zarathustrian, seems difficult to accept. I am inclined to agree

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1. See Y.45.11
2. See Y.43.4; 29.6; 45.3; 43.5; 46.3
3. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.67.
4. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, Zoroastre, p.132.

with both Zaehner and Frye that the term "Mazda" was added to the divine name Ahura by Zarathustra himself.[1] Thus, from his predecessors Zarathustra took over the belief in the "ahuras," transformed that belief to a sole "ahura" whom he saw as the "Mazda," and therefore called him "Ahura Mazda," meaning The Wise Lord!

The relationship of Ahura Mazda to the other powers, or "entities," is not so easy to define. He is spoken of as the father of "Vohu Mana," as he is also the father of "Asha," and his daughter is "Aramaiti."[2] But Ahura Mazda is also the "true creator of Asha."[3] Through the "spenta mainyu," (good spirit) and the "vohu mana," (good mind) Ahura Mazda grants "haurvatat" (perfection) and "Ameretatat" (immortality) to those whose words and deeds are in harmony with "asha" (truth), with "xshathra" (kingdom or majesty), and with "aramaiti" (right-mind).[4]

Zarathustra saw mankind as divided into two opposing parties: the "asha-vants" (followers of truth),

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1. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism, p.64; R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.55.
2. See Y.31.8; 44.3; 47.2; 45.4
3. See Y.31.8
4. See Y.47.1

who were the just and the god-fearing; and the "dreg-vants" (followers of evil/lie), among whom were classed "evil rulers, evil doers, evil speakers, those of evil conscience, and evil thinkers."[1] But what the prophet saw here and now on earth, as basic dualism, he projected to the whole cosmos. He came to see that this fundamental tension existed both in the material as well as in the spiritual spheres. Over against a transcendental "good mind" stood the "evil mind;" over against the "good spirit" stood the "evil spirit;" and so on. Yet, on every level a choice had to be made. This insistence on "freedom of choice" is a marked characteristic of the Gathas. Thus, what stands in Zarathustra's teaching is not the ethical dualism of "good" versus "evil," but the importance of man as an arbiter between them! Not only is each individual ultimately faced with making his choice between "truth" and "evil/lie," but even in the animal kingdom the ox had freedom to choose between the "good" and the "false" shepherd.[2] Taking this concrete situation which he saw on earth, Zarathustra

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1. See Y.49.11
2. See Y.31.9,10

projected it on to the spiritual world, by introducing the ancient myth of the twin "spirits." [1]

Side by side with the fundemental principle of freedom of choice, Zarathustra taught that the good is its own reward; that happiness and misery are the consequences of a man's good and evil deeds.[2] He saw the "final consumation of creation," at which time his god Ahura Mazda was to come with his three powers, and that ultimately "sinners would deliver the evil/lie into the hands of truth," and that "eternal joy would reign everywhere."[3] The souls of men would be judged at the "bridge of the requitter," when to the just will be alloted their eternal reward, while to the evil their final doom.[4] Hell and heaven were the abode of the most "evil mind" and the "good mind" alternately.[5] Or, more typically, hell was "drujo demana" (the house of the lie), where the karapans and the kavayas, and all "evil rulers, evil doers, evil speakers, those of evil conscience, and evil thinkers" dwell.[6] On the other hand, heaven

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1. SeeY.30.3-6
2. See Y.33.2-3
3. See Y.43.5-6; 30.8; 30.11
4. See Y.46.11; 51.13
5. See Y.32.13,15
6. See Y.46.11; 49.11; 51.14

was "garo demana" (the house of praise), where Ahura Mazda dwelt from the beginning, and was the abode of the "magas," where all the souls of the righteous were to be blessed with Ahura Mazda's reward of "perfection" and "immortality."[1]

It has already been stated that Zarathustra made the "fire" the centre of his cultus. In fact, so that an individual might exercise his free will intelligently Ahura Mazda gave His "manangha" (pure mind) and His "atar" (flaming fire/fire of thought).[2] This "atar" is an "enduring, blazing Flame bringing clear guidance and joy to the true believer, but as for the destruction-loving, this quickening Flame overcomes his evil 'with a turn of the hand.'"[3] It is through the energy of "atar" that Ahura Mazda assigns the just dues to the "dreg-vants," and to the "asha-vants."[4] Zarathustra, who had realized the importance of "atar" prays thus to Ahura Mazda:

> "O Mazda Ahura... henceforth
> I will dedicate the consecration
> of my homage to Thy atar, and, as
> long as I have the power, I will
> meditate upon asha." 5

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1. See Y.51.15; 31.21
2. See Y.46.7
3. See Y.34.4
4. See Y.43.4; 47.6
5. See Y.43.9

In conclusion, then, we can say that Zarathustra, who lived around the middle of the seventh century B.C. in Eastern Iran, was a reformer as well as a prophet. He tried to bring some reformation into the traditional pantheistic religion, by promoting the supremacy of his own god Ahura Mazda. With Ahura Mazda as the only god, the notions hitherto associated - in the Indo-Iranian cosmology - with the other "ahuras" and "daevas" become subordinated to him. And perhaps without losing all their primitive meaning, Zarathustra made these notions the "powers" or "entities" of his god Ahura Mazda. Furthermore, the elements of struggle which lay scattered in the ancient myths of gods, demons, and monsters, Zarathustra welded into a single universal conflict: good versus evil, in which god and man take part together.

When Zarathustra as a prophet upheld his high ethical ideals and denounced the "daeva" deities by identifying them with the demons, and its worshippers as followers of the "druj," he came into sharp conflict with the priests. Bitterly disappointed, he cried in despair:

> To what land shall I flee?
> Where bend my steps? I am

> thrust out from family and
> tribe; I have no favor from
> the village to which I belong,
> nor from the wicked rulers of
> the country: how then, O Lord,
> shall I obtain Thy favor? 1

But suddenly a ray of hope flashed back in him as he triumphed in his own faith. "So long as Thou rulest over my destiny," says Zarathustra to Ahura Mazda, "I shall be a crying suppliant of Thy Holy wisdom."[2] His passionate concern for his god Ahura Mazda, his witnessing the outrageous and shameless perversion of the religious rites, his utter despair at being deserted by kindred and fellow-workers, and his own inner doubts and questionings, must have deeply moved this great prophet. Like the prophets Joshua and Micah, Zarathustra's words exhoed triumphantly to haunt the imagination of men ever after:

> "As for me, O Ahura, I choose
> Thee alone as Master." 3

Before concluding this section, something should be said in regards to two problematic subjects-both evidences based on tradition. There is some

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1. See Y.46.1
2. See Y.50.9
3. cf. Joshua 24:15, Micah 7:7, and Y.46.3

evidence that Zarathustra organized, perhaps in an informal way, a fellowship or brotherhood of his followers, and that this brotherhood had certain divisions within it.[1] The three grades of his disciples were: the "Xvaetu" (strong in spirit), the "Verezena" (fellow-worker), and the "Airyamna" (friend).[2] Beyond this nothing is known for certain, and it would be futile to speculate. However, a group recognized by Zarathustra was the "maga brotherhood;" and although it is difficult to assess the status of this "maga" group, he nevertheless seems to have accepted their teaching.[3] Besides, the Gathas speak of Kava Vishtaspa as the "renowned in the great maga brotherhood."[4] But here comes the second problem: the tradition about Vishtaspa who adopted Zarathustra's teaching. What then was the relationship of the "magas" to Zarathustra? It is discouraging that after so many years of research nothing precisely is known. Here and there certain names are mentioned, such as Maidhyomaongha, Paoruchista, Frashaoshtra, Havovi.[5]

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1. See Y.32.1; 33.3; 46.1; 49.7
2. See note # 1 above.
3. See Y.29.11; 33.7
4. See Y.46.14; 51.16
5. See Y.51.19; 53.3; 28.8; 51.17

But even these names do not explain the relationship of the "magas" to Zarathustra. Only as one turns to later tradition - the Pahlavi tradition - can one be enlightened as to the identity of these names.[1] Maidhyomaongha was Zarathustra's cousin and first disciple. Havovi, the sister of Frashaoshtra, was married to Zarathustra, and their youngest daughter Paoruchista married her uncle Jamaspa, brother of Havovi and Frashaoshtra. Both brothers, Jamaspa and Frashaoshtra, had a high position at the court of Kava Vishtaspa. Thus, when "his own received him not" in eastern Iran, Zarathustra probably fled south-westwards, where through the marital ties, he found refuge at the court of Vishtaspa (Darius's father ?), and his teachings penetrated into the Achaemenian empire.

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1. For further details regarding Pahlavi writings one should refer to the Sacred Books of the East Series, Oxford, 1887.

CHAPTER THREE

THREE INDO-ARYAN RELIGIONS

The Achaemenians traced their family to its founder Achaemenes (OP Haxāmaniš), the father of Teispes, Cyrus's ancestor. After Cyrus's death, his son Cambyses (529-522 B.C.) continued his father's work and succeeded in the conquest of Egypt and the Greek Islands of Cyprus and Samos.[1] Before his death, the throne had been forcefully taken by the Magian Gaumata who claimed to be Bardiya (Gk. Σμερδις) the brother of Cambyses.[2] His reign lasted only six months, when Darius (522-486 B.C.), son of Hystapses (OP Vištāspa), a member of the older branch of the Achaemenian family, succeeded in securing the throne for himself. Due to his extraordinary military

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1. For further historical details re Achaemenids, see, R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.37-147, and R.Ghirshman, Iran, p.112-219.

2. For story of usurper Gaumata, compare, Herodotus, The Histories, III.61-79, R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.120, R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.113f., A.T.Olmstead, History of the Persian Empire, p.107f.

genius, he restored and extended the empire from Sogdiana in the north-east to Libya in the south-west, and from Thracia in the north-west to India in the south-east.[1] Several years before his death Darius designated his son Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.) as his successor. One of his first tasks when he ascended the throne was to suppress the revolts in Egypt and Babylonia and to restore peace in the empire.

Historians usually note that the "reign of Darius marks the culminating point both of the power of the empire and of the whole Achaemenian civilization."[2] Thus, starting with Xerxes I, all successive kings are referred to as the "later" Achaemenians. With the rise of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.), rivalries, intrigues, and assassinations centred around the throne, while unrest and revolts took place in many parts of the Persian empire. So much blood had been shed within the royal family that after the assassination of Artaxerxes III (359-338 B.C.), a distant relative, Darius III (336-330 B.C.) was the only survivor to

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1. See map on page 85
2. R.Ghirshman, Iran, p.189

succeed the throne. The end of the Achaemenids had come, as Alexander at the head of his Macedonian warriors conquered the Persian empire.

The religious situation during the Achaemenid dynasty has been a controversial subject, and scholars have by no means yet reached a happy solution. Two opposing views have emerged in the heat of the debate. The one, by taking for granted the identity of Vishtaspas as the father of Darius and the protector of Zarathustra, holds that the Achaemenid dynasty, or rather the Achaemenian kings, were "true" Zarathustrians. Naturally, the second view rejects this by taking an opposite position.

"Much has already been written," says Frye, "about the religion of the Achaemenids which cannot be supported by any evidence."[1] How true this is! But the real problem lies within the evidence itself. The chief sources that are of special relevance to the Achaemenian religion are so meagre that they have led to various speculative interpretations. Basically,

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1. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.119

the most important sources are two in number: the Old Persian inscriptions[1] and the Greek classical writings.[2] To this may possibly be added certain archaeological evidence and the information which we have hitherto gathered in our description of the Indo-Iranian legacy. Let us now proceed to take a closer look at these sources and attempt to reconstruct the religious situation as it existed during and under the Achaemenid dynasty.

1. The Old Persian Inscriptions

A few miles north of Persepolis is Naqš-i-ruštam where four gigantic niches, cut in the shape of Greek crosses, serve as entrances to the tombs lying in the rock behind them. One of the tombs is Darius's, whose figure stands before an altar with Ahura Mazda hovering on top, and we read the following interesting inscription:

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1. The inscription of the Achemenid kings, primarily Darius's and Xerxes's are in three languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian.

2. Only Herodotus will be used in this thesis, since he was contemporary with the Achaemenian period. Xenophon sometimes draws on sources that we know, chiefly Herodotus, at other times transforms history into a fiction to make it serve moral purposes. Strabo (63 B.C. - 19 A.D.) is chronologically far removed.

> "A great god is Ahuramazda,
> who created this earth, who
> created yonder sky, who
> created man, who created
> happiness for man, who made
> Darius king, one king of
> many, one lord of many."[1]

Thus, Ahura Mazda[2] was the great god; the creator of all and the benefactor of every living creature. So far, Darius's religion seems to agree with that of Zarathustra's, in that it recognizes Ahura Mazda as the "supreme" lord. But, just as Zarathustra recognized the existence of other "ahuras" besides Ahura Mazda, so does Darius recognize the existence of other gods beside Ahura Mazda:

> "Saith Darius the King: This
> which I did, in one and the
> same year, by the favor of
> Ahuramazda I did; Ahuramazda
> bore me aid, and the other
> gods who are.
> Saith Darius the King: For
> this reason Ahuramazda bore
> aid, and the other gods who
> are, because I was not hostile,
> I was not a Lie-follower, I
> was not a doer of wrong . . ."[3]

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1. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.138 (DNa lines 1-8)
2. In the Gathas Ahura Mazda are two words; in the Old Persian inscription it is one word.
3. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.132 (DBIV lines 59-64)

Who the "other gods" were, of course, Darius does not tell us, but he does explicitly inform us that the reason for Ahura Mazda to grant him success was because he "was not hostile, was not a Lie-follower." Do we possibly see traces here of the ethical dualism of the prophet Zarathustra? One is almost tempted to say that Darius "boasted" of not being a "dreg-vant" (Lie-follower). Of course, whether Darius had this inscribed before his death, or whether the "Zarathustrian" party priests, having the upper hand then, inscribed it after his death, is another matter and need not detain us. Suffice it to say that Darius's inscription recognized Zarathustra's Ahura Mazda as a deity, and that he seems to subscribe to the dualistic concept of "Truth and Lie" as taught by Zarathustra. As for the"other gods", it is difficult to know whether it refers to the divided deities of Zarathustra or to the Indo-Iranian deities that were still worshipped.

Finally, a brief but interesting bit of information is seen again in Darius's inscription, in regards to the usurper Gaumata:

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> "Saith Darius the King: the kingdom which had been taken away from our family, that I put in its place; I re-established it on its foundation. As before, so I made the sanctuaries which Gaumata the Magian destroyed." 1

Gaumata is here called a "magian," and Darius informs us that he restored not only the proper dynasty, but also the "santuaries" which Gaumata had destroyed. More will be said about this later, but let us note here that some kind of a conflict existed in the religious sphere.

The next important find is the so-called "daiva" inscription of Xerxes, carved on stone tablets, found in Persepolis[2] and Pasargadae.[3] Ahura Mazda, Arta, daivas and sanctuaries are all mentioned, and so, let us quote at length:

> "Saith Xerxes the King: When that I became king, there is among these countries which are inscribed above (one which) was in commotion. Afterwards Ahuramazda bore me aid; by the favor of Ahuramazda I smote that

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1. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.120 (DBI lines 61-66)
2. E.F.Schmidt, The Treasury of Persepolis, p.11f
3. D.Stronach, "Pasargadae" in Iran, Vol.III(1965) p. 19f.

> country and put it down in its place.
> And among these countries there was (a place) where previously false gods were worshipped. 1 Afterwards, by the favor of Ahuramazda, I destroyed that sanctuary of the demons, and I made proclamation,"The demons shall not be worshipped!" Where previously the demons were worshipped, there I worshipped Ahuramazda and Arta reverent(ly). And there was other(business) that had been done ill; that I made good. That which I did, all I did by the favor of Ahuramazda. Ahuramazda bore me aid, until I completed the work. Thou who (shalt be) hereafter, if thou shalt think, "Happy may I be when living, and when dead may I be blessed," have respect for the law which Ahuramazda has established; worship Ahuramazda and Arta reverent(ly). The man who has respect for that law which Ahuramazda has established, and worships Arta reverent(ly), he both becomes happy while living, and becomes blessed when dead." 2

Before analysing the contents of this inscription let us look at one more. Xerxes was the last of the Achaemenian kings to have left such a considerable legacy of inscriptions, and after him

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1. The Old Persian word for "false gods" is "Daiva."

2. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.151-152(XPh lines13-56) For the Akkadian version of this text, see, J.B.Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p.316f.

the only person that needs to be mentioned is Artaxerxes II. His inscription is found at Susa, on the base of four columns:

> "Saith Artaxerxes the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries, King in this earth, son of Darius the King, ... an Achaemenian. This palace Darius my great-great-grandfather built; later under Artaxerxes may grandfather it was burned; by the favor of Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras, this palace I built. May Ahuramazda, Anaitis, and Mithras protect me from all evil, and that which I have built may they not shatter nor harm." 1

And finally, on a gold tablet found in Hamadan, we read:

> "A great god is Ahuramazda, the greatest of gods, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man ..."2

With these main sources now at our disposal, let us attempt to group the Old Persian inscriptions. Three major issues seem to attract one's attention: Ahura Mazda and his position vis à vis the other gods; the role of Darius in regards to the sanctuaries(OP ayadana)

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1. R.G.Kent, Old Persian, p.154 (A2Sa lines 1-5)
2. Ibid. p.155 (A2Hc lines 1-3)

destroyed by the magian Gaumata; and the role of Xerxes in regards to the sanctuaries of the "daiva."

All three Achaemenian kings, Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, boast of their god Ahuramazda, by whose help they accomplished their deeds. But all three seem to proclaim their great god as "the greatest of the gods," that is to say, the greatest god among the gods, and not the "sole" god. In fact, Darius explicitly tells us that "Ahuramazda and the other gods" bore him aid. Ahura Mazda cannot be credited alone for Darius's success; along with him were the "other gods" as well. Xerxes similarly speaks of "Ahuramazda and Arta," and where previously the demons were worshipped, there Xerxes established the worship of "Ahuramazda and Arta reverently." Artaxerxes goes one step further and speaks of the favor bestowed upon him not only by Ahura Mazda, but also by "Anaitis and Mithras." Is there here a trace of the Indo-Iranian legacy which was described in the first chapter? This would of course lead us to suspect the "other gods;" were they also associated with Ahura Mazda?

As mentioned previously, modern scholars have been split between two schools of thought. Basing their evidence chiefly on these Old Persian inscriptions and the writings of Herodotus, (which we shall be examining too) they have taken great pains, by going into lengthy and complicated arguments, to prove ingeniously the side they wish to support. Here is, for example, Herzfeld's view. He assumes that Vishtaspa of the Gathas is none other than the historical Vishtaspa, father of Darius:

> "Zoroaster lived during the sixth century B.C., that means under the reign of Cambyses and the false Smerdis, the magus Gaumata; that his mission was fulfilled with Darius's ascension to the throne; that Darius and his two immediate successors, Xerxes and Artaxerxes I, not only were Zoroastrians, but the only true ones; and that Darius, son of Hystaspes (Vishtaspa), was the prophet's pupil ... and the 'Defender of the Faith' of the Iranian epics." 1

Thus, at least three of the Achaemenid kings - Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes I - were the "only true Zoroastrians," according to Herzfeld.

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1. E.Herzfeld,"The Iranian Religion at the time of Darius and Xerxes," in Religions, 15: p.20

Naturally, those opposing the view that the Achaemenid kings were true Zoroastrians consider the Old Persian inscriptions as peculiar to the ancient Indo-Iranian beliefs and views. For example, Benveniste thinks that the "Persian religion of Herodotus and that of the Achaemenids," are identical, that is to say pre-Zarathustrian, and have nothing in common with Zarathustrianism.[1] A slightly different view is that of Duchesne-Guillemin. He thinks that both Ahura Mazda and the ethical concept of dualism were ancient, while Zarathustra's originality was twofold: he elevated Ahura Mazda, previously god supreme, to the dignity of god unique; and he emphasized the moral character of the traditional religion by making it a sort of dualistic synthesis.[2] The religion of the Achaemenids, however, was not influenced by Zarathustra's reform but remained independent. Here is what he has to say:

> "Ainsi, la religion des Achaéménides, tout au moins celle de Darius, de Cyrus à plus forte raison, et de leur successeurs jusqu'à Artaxerxès,

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1. E.Benveniste, The Persian Religion, p.22-49
2. J.Duchesne-Guillemin, Ormazd et Ahriman, p.25f.

> ne derivait pas de la reforme zoroastrienne. Mouvement independant, elle nous donne une ideé de ce qu'eût été la religion iranienne sans Zarathustra et nous permet ainsi, par comparison, d'appré-cier à sa juste mesure l'originalité du prophète."[1]

Before grouping any issues let us consider the other two important points. Darius explicitly tells us that he reconstructed the sanctuaries which Gaumata had destroyed. He also distinguishes Gaumata by the title "magian". Leaving for the moment the problem of the "magian" (with which we shall deal later), one is still left in the dark as to what the "sanctuaries" were. Until further evidence comes to enlighten us, it would be futile to speculate.

As for the "sanctuaries" destroyed by Xerxes, we are told that one country among his countries worshipped the "daiva." Xerxes identifies these "daiva" as "demons," and therefore destroys their sanctuary, establishing in its place the worship of

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1. J.Duchesne-Guillemin, Ormazd et Ahriman, p.25f. It seems that Duchesne-Guillemin later changed from this position; compare his view in The Western Response to Zoroaster, Oxford, 1958

Ahura Mazda and Arta. Of course we do not know whether this was in retaliation to the previous scheme of Gaumata's destruction of sanctuaries, during his father's, Darius's, reign. Herzfeld, who, as we noted, regarded the three Achaemenid kings as the "only true Zoroastrians," has strong convictions in regards to Xerxes's action of destroying the "daiva" sanctuaries:

> "Xerxes certainly did not introduce a new religion. What he tried was to enforce a religion that had not been generally accepted. Religion cannot be enforced, and it is only natural that Xerxes's attempt failed. The failure is indicated by Artaxerxes II: the return to old Magian religions." 1

According to Herzfeld, then, Xerxes's action is a sign of enforcing the unaccepted religion of Zarathustra. This naturally failed, and with Artaxerxes II a return to the"old Magian religion" is seen. The difficuly, of course, which Herzfeld also recognized, was to reconcile in the Old Persian inscriptions the non-Zarathustrain patterns with patterns of reform as brought by the prophet. Since both were evidenced in these Old Persian sources, Herzfeld ingeniously solves

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1. E.Herzfeld,"The Iranian Religion at the time of Darius and Xerxes," in Religions, 15: p.20

the dilemma by placing three kings as the true followers of the prophet, while the rest, both before Darius and after Artaxerxes I, he regards as worshippers of the "old Magian religions." Be that as it may, we still have to ask who these "daiva" were. Zaehner beleives that they are none other "than the daevas whom Zoroaster so vigorously attacks in the Gathas, a class of Indo-Iranian deity which had come to be associated with violence."[1] On the other hand, Frye equates them with the "devs" (evil spirits) of later Iran, and therefore thinks that they are a "foreign" or"non-Mazda" worship.[2] Both, however, conclude that Xerxes was acting in a general Zarathustrian spirit.

Grouping all the information we have so far from the Old Persian inscriptions, one can say that at least two religious "threads" are mutually evident: Zarathustrian and Indo-Iranian. For supporting the Zarathustrian influence, one need not mention the very obvious observation of the god Ahura Mazda vis à

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1. R.C.Zaehner, The Dawn & Twilight of Zoroastriansim, p.159
2. R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.145

vis the other deities. Whether Ahura Mazda enjoyed a higher position in the heirarchy of the gods, or not, is really irrelevant to us now. What is of importance is that Ahura Mazda has been adopted into the existing pantheon. Furthermore, two clear instances of Zarathustra's ethical dualism are evident. Darius points out that he was not a "Lie-follower," while Xerxes abolishes the "daiva" worship. This, as we have already noted, was the prophet's message: man's responsibility to choose between the good and evil and his being identified as an"asha-vant"(follower of truth) or a "dreg-vant" (follower of the druj, or lie).

In contrast to the Zarathustrian influence we also note the Indo-Iranian legacy. We need only mention the names of the deities, as seen in the Old Persian inscriptions, that were privileged to be part of the pantheon: Arta, Mithras, Anaitis, and "the other gods." Hence, two religious movements, at least, existed side by side; or had the two gone through a process of modification and syncretism? Since this question cannot be answered in the light of the inscriptions that we have examined so far, let us turn to the

classical Greek sources - the "Histories" of Herodotus- to see if any further information can enlighten us to answer this question.

2. The Writings of Herodotus

Born in Halicarnassus, Herodotus' chief purpose in writing "The Histories" was to show how the Greeks of Asia became the subject to the Persians. In his descriptions of the campaigns of the various Achaemenid kings, Herodotus tells us that the Persian army consisted of many tribes and nations: such as the Assyrians, Bactrians, Caspians, Arabians, Ethiopians, etc., among whom were also the Medes and the Persians.[1] He also records his observations regarding the different and yet distinct social, economical,and religious customs of many peoples, including once again the Medes and the Persians.[2] Unfortunately, this distinct religious difference between the Medes and the Persians has either been ignored, or simply overlooked, by many students of

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1. Herodotus VII.61-96
2. Ibid. I.192-200; I.215-216-; II.35-42; II.58-98; III.20-24.

Herodotus. Thus, some, like Benveniste, considering the two religious customs as one, conclude that Herodotus' views reveal the ancient Indo-Iranian religious beliefs and practices. Here is what Benveniste has to say:

> "... the Persian religion which Herodotus knew is not that of Zoroaster, but the primitive form of the Iranian religion, thoroughly impregnated with polytheism and paying homage to the deified forces of nature."[1]

Furthermore, he sees described by Herodotus

> "a form of religion, which, in beliefs and practices, conforms in its broad outlines to what must have remained in ancient Iran pantheism and nature worship, entirely based on sacrifice." 2

Naturally, one could argue against this view by posing the following question: If the Persian religion of Herodotus corresponds to the ancient Indo-Iranian religious concepts and practices, how is it that

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1. E.Benveniste, The Persian Religion, p.22-49
2. Ibid. One should read all of chapter II.

Herodotus has no reference at all to the "daiva" worshippers, or the intoxicating cult of "haoma," which, as we have already seen, was an Indo-Aryan legacy? Be that as it may, one also is led to doubt whether Herodotus himself fully realized the separate religious nature of the Medes and the Persians - though he had observed their different burial customs.

Before discussing or analysing any further, it would be worthwhile to quote at length all the pertinent passages in Herodotus, while taking note of the distinctions that he had observed.[1]

> "The customs of the Persians, as I know, are these. They do not think it lawful to make images, neither do they build altars or temples, charging them with folly who do such things. This, I suppose, is because they never regarded the gods as being of a nature like man's, as the Greeks do. It is their wont, when they go to offer sacrifice to Zeus,[2] to go up to the highest parts of the mountains; and they call the whole circle of the sky by the name of Zeus. They sacrifice

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1. All quotations are from The World's Classics Series, translated by H. Carter.

2. Dyeus (Gk. Zeus; Latin Jupiter) was an Indo-Aryan deity whose counterpart and consort was "Mother Earth." He was the shinning god of the sky, the giver of rain and fertility, etc.

also to the sun, the moon, earth, fire, water, and the winds. Those are their original gods; but they have since learnt from the Assyrians and Arabians to sacrifice to the Heavenly Aphrodite,[1] who by the Assyrians is called Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, and by the Persians Mitra.[2]
And the fashion of sacrifice to these gods among the Persians is this. He who goes to sacrifice builds no altar, kindles no fire, makes no libation, nor uses music, or fillets, or barley meal; but wreathing his cap, generally with myrtle, he leads the victim to a clean piece of ground and invokes the god. He that offers must not pray for himself alone, but that it may be well with all the Persians and with the king, for 'among all the Persians' he is one. When he has cut the victim in pieces and boiled the flesh, he lays it all on a bed of tender grass, or, more often, trefoil; and this done, a Magian stands by the sacrifice and sings over it an ode concerning the origin of the gods (or such they say it is); and without a Magian they may not offer a sacrifice. Then after a short time, he that offered it carries away the flesh and does as he pleases with it."[3]

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1. The great goddess (Mother of Heaven and Earth) worshipped by Eastern nations under various names - Mylitta in Assyria, Astarte in Phoenicia - was called τῇ Οὐρανίῃ θέειν, the Heavenly Aphrodite, or simply the Heavenly One, by the Greeks.

2. Herodotus makes a strange mistake in confusing the Persian Mithra, once closely connected with the sun, with the heavenly divinity - the goddess Astarte (Assyrian Ištar).

3. Herodotus I.131-132.

The custom of burial must have interested Herodotus, since he clearly points the difference of the ceremony as practiced by the Magians and the Persians.

> "So much I can say of them with certainty from my own knowledge. But there are things said as though secretly and not plainly about their dead, how they are not buried until they have been torn by some bird or dog. That this is so with the Magians I know, for they practice it openly. The Persians treat the corpse with wax and then cover it with earth. The Magians differ much from other men and are not like the priests of Egypt; for the Egyptian priests will not pollute themselves by killing any animal, except such as they sacrifice; but the Magians will kill with their own hands anything but a man or a dog: indeed they pride themselves upon destroying ants and snakes and things beside that creep or fly. Thus it has been accustomed from ancient times."[1]

A few more important passages in regards to "sacrifice," both animal and human, might enlighten us in distinguishing the religious customs of the Persians from that of the Magians.

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1. Herodotus I.140

> "... The country here round about Mount Pangaeus is called Phyllis, and it reaches the river Angites, a tributary of the Strymon, on the west and the Strymon on the south. Beside this river the Magians sacrificed for omens, killing white horses.[1] They performed these and many other magic rites to placate the river at Nine Ways, a city of the Edonians, and went forward by the bridges, for the Strymon had already been bridged for them. And when they learned that the place was named Nine Ways, they buried nine boys and nine girls there alive, being children of the people of that country. Burying alive is a Persian[2] custom: I have heard that when she reached old age, Amestris, the wife of Xerxes, buried fourteen children of notable Persians as a thank-offering from her to the god who is supposed to be below ground."[3]

Perhaps, before we proceed to group the above information, some explanation should be made in regards to the "Magians." The picture we get from

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1. The offering of a "horse" as a sacrifice seems to have been not only the custom of the Persians, but the Massagatae(I.216) and the Scythians(IV.61,62).

2. Human sacrifices does not seem to have been common in Persia, though other tribes may have performed them; cf. IV.62,71,94.

3. Herodotus VII.113-114.

Herodotus about the "Magians," though scanty, yet is informative.

> "Now Deioces united only the Medes under him, and theirs was the only nation that he ruled; and the tribes of the Medes are these: Busae, Parataceni, Struchates, Arizanti, Budians, and Magians."[1]

There were many disorganized tribes and local rulers in the Iranian plateau, who were frequently at war both among themselves, as well as against settled kingdoms, during especially the ninth century B.C. The formation of a "Median" confederation, or state, came when a certain chieftain called Daiukku (the Greek Deioces) devised a plan, in 716 B.C., for the union of certain tribal chiefs.[2] But around this time the Cimmerians and the Scythians appeared on the scene and caused serious disturbances. It was not until around 673 B.C. that Kashtaritu (OP Khshathrita, Gk, Φραόρτης) re-formed a united "Median" state; but he was soon defeated. With the rise of Cyaxares the united "Median" power grew greater than ever before, and the Persians,

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1. Herodotus I.101. cf.with Jerem.25:25 מָדָי וְכָל־

2. For a detailed history of the Medes, see, R.N.Frye, The Heritage of Persia, p.92-102; R.Ghirshman, Iran, p.90-126.

now in Persis, submitted to the "Medes."[1] But when Cyrus revolted in 550 B.C. the Medes lost their power, and now became subject to the Persians.[2]

The "Magians" then, were originally a tribe that joined with other tribes to form the pre-Achaemenid nation knowmas the"Medes." Though in political power for some time, they had come under the rule of their once subject people - the Persians. Their national and political aspiration revived when the "Magian" Gaumata,(or as Herodotus calls him, the "Magian" Smerdis) attempted a "coup" during the Persian suzerainty of Cambyses, regained the power and was successful in controlling the empire for a short while until Darius recaptured the empire, and, according to Herodotus, massacred "en masse" the "Magians," so that had night not overtaken them, no single "magian" would have been alive.[3]

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1. Herodotus I.102. Whether it was Phraortes or his son and successor Cyaxeres who subjugated the Persians is a matter of debate, and need not concern us.

2. Herodotus I.130.

3. Both Herodotus and the Old Persian inscriptions refer to the "usurper" as the "Magian." Comapre both episodes: Herodotus III.61-79, and R.G.Kent,Old Persian, p.120.

> "This day all Persians alike keep as the greatest of their holidays: they celebrate it with a great feast and call it the Massacre of the Magians. During it no Magian may come into the light of day, but all must stay in their houses."[1]

The "Magians" were not only active in political and social circles, but also performed various religious activities and rites as has been mentioned above. Of course, just as we cannot conclude that all the "Magians" were politicians, we should also not conclude that all "Magians" were religious leaders or priests. The Magians were a tribe within a larger group of people called the Medes. Some among them aspired for political power, while others were involved in religious matters. Some among them acted as soothsayers and interpreters of dreams:

> "This dream he(Astyages) put to the interpreters of dreams among the Magians, and when they told him all that there was to be told, they alarmed him."[2]

But now let us return to discuss the religious functions of the "Magian-Medes" as well as the

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1. Herodotus III.79
2. Ibid. I.107; see also I.120, 128.

Achaemenid-Persians.

Though the "Magian-Medes" were related to the "Achaemenid-Persians" by family ties,[1] and though both could claim the ancient Indo-Aryan religious legacy as their heritage, yet each had developed along different religious lines, as can be evidenced from the descriptions of Herodotus. The Achaemenid kings, however, demonstrated a tolerant policy towards the religious rites of the Magian-Medes. But let us first group Herodotus' observations. Perhaps his accounts can be summarized under two important headings: the Pantheon and the Cultus.

a. The Pantheon

Herodotus tells us that sacrifices were offered to the following gods: the whole circle of the sky called Zeus (Gk. Δία), the Sun(ἥλιος), the Moon (σελήνη), Earth(γῆ), Fire(πῦρ), Water(ὕδωρ), and the Winds (ἄνεμος). Also, borrowing from the Assyrians and Arabians, sacrifices

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1. Astyages, the last Median ruler, was the grandfather of the Achaemenian Cyrus II, from the mother's side.

were offered to the Heavenly Aphrodite. It is really irrelevant to us whether Herodotus was right or mistaken in his identification of names (Zeus and Mitra) regarding the sky and heavenly firmament. What is important to us however, is that the "polytheistic" pantheon which he describes corresponds with the Indo-Aryan legacy, of which both the "Magian-Medes" and the "Achaemenid-Persians" (and for that matter Zarathustra) claimed heritage. Besides, we have met most of these gods. Vivahvant was the Sun-god who had a son, Yima, and both were responsible for the animal and drink sacrifices. Herodotus further informs us that at sunrise,[1] Xerxes

> "εὔχετο πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον . . .
> prayed to the Sun to let nothing befall that might prevent him from pursuing the conquest of Europe ..."[2]

Again, Atar the Fire-god was venerated by the Indo-Iranians and became supremely sacred in Zarathustra's own doctrine. Herodotus, speaking of the impious act

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1. Observe Herodotus III.84 where the choice of a monarch is fixed for "sunrise" time!

2. Herodotus VII.54. Note also how Herod.I.138 points that the Persians regarded leprosy as a punishment for sinning against the "Sun-god."

of Cambyses in Memphis, Egypt, states that Cambyses' command to burn Amasis' embalmed body was not only contrary to both Persians and Egyptian customs, but was a sacrilegious act, because,

> "Πέρσαι γὰρ θεὸν νομίζουσι εἶναι πῦρ
> the Persians venerate Fire as a god."[1]

Another observation that Herodotus makes is in regards to the Wind-god Vayu, who was worshipped by the Indo-Iranians from time immemorial. At one of the Greek ports, the Persians fleet, which was under Xerxes' direction, encountered a great storm that lasted for three days, but,

> "Τέλος δὲ ἔντομά τε ποιεῦντες καὶ
> καταείδοντες γόητι τῷ ἀνέμῳ οἱ μάγοι...
>
> at last the Magians, by offering
> up victims and chanting spells
> to the Wind..stilled the tempest."[2]

Haurvatat was the Indo-Iranian Water-god, and we learn from Herodotus that the Persians

> "ἐς ποταμὸν δὲ οὔτε ἐνουρέουσι οὔτε
> ἐμπτύουσι οὐ χεῖρας ἐναπονίζονται
> οὐδὲ ἄλλον οὐδένα περιορῶσι, ἀλλὰ
> σέβονται ποταμοὺς μάλιστα...
> never make water nor spit into a river
> nor wash their hands in it, nor will
> they allow others to do so, for they
> have great reverence for the rivers."[3]

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1. Herodotus III.16
2. Ibid. VII.191
3. Ibid. I.138

This reverence for the Water-god is also seen in the religious - not irreligious as some think - acts of Xerxes, who is said to have scourged the Hellespont, upbraided it as"bitter Water," and said,

> "it is no wonder that men do
> not offer you sacrifices, for
> you are a muddy and salty river."[1]

Herodotus does not seem to distinguish between the gods worshipped by the "Magian-Medes" and those worshipped by the "Achaemenid-Persians." Both groups worshipped the Indo-Iranian pantheon. We have already seen how Zarathustra came upon such a polytheistic scene and tried to reform the pantheistic concept by promoting his god Ahura Mazda as the supreme god over all the other deities. His teachings must have found receptive ears within the Achaemenian empire, as three kings at least, we saw, mentioned the prophet's god in their insrciptions. Herodotus does not show any awareness of "Ahura Mazda." But this should not surprise us, since neither does he seem to be aware of the proper Iranian names of the

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1. Herodotus VII.35

gods he mentioned, such as "Atar" for fire, "Vayu" for wind, "Vivahvant" for sun, nor does he seem to be aware of the "ahura" or the "daeva" deities. Furthermore, Herodotus does not seem to possess any understanding of the Indo-Iranian religious heritage of myths and beliefs, such as the "Asha," "Mainyu," or "Yima," though he seems to be well versed in the Greek legends and myths. What Herodotus did observe were the distinct religious customs and rituals, that is to say, the external visible acts that can be observed by an "outsider." His information however, is very interesting, and so let us turn to analyse it.

b. The Cultus

Broadly speaking, Herodotus' remarks concerns three major Median - Persian rites. They can be considered as "worship rite," "sacrificial rite," and "burial rite."

1. Worship Rite - Of the religious customs and rituals among the "Magian"-Medes" and the "Achaemenid-Persians," Herodotus sometimes points explicitly to the differences, while at other times simply omits them.

Looking back at the information which was quoted at length, we note how he states that the Persians "built no temples, no altars, made no images or statues."[1] From the Greek point of view, I suppose he was right. The "Persians" had no temples with altars and statues of the gods (as did the Babylonians and Egyptians) where the faithful could worship. Nevertheless, they did have "fire-temples" (altars), and we know of at least two belonging to the Achaemenian period: one at Pasargadae built during Cyrus's reign (550-529 B.C.),[2] and the other at Naqš-i-rustam in front of the tomb of Darius (522-486 B.C.).[3] Furthermore, we have a cylinder seal that depicts the picture of two priests, standing in front of a fire-altar, beneath the sacred symbol of Ahura Mazda, with a table upon which a mortar with an inserted pestle is displayed.[4] It appears, therefore, that the religious ceremonies took place in the open air; for all the altars known to us, and they are usually twin altars, have been found in

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1. Herodotus I.131-132
2. D.Stronach,"Excavations at Pasargadae," Iran, Vol.I(1963), p.29f., and Vol.III(1965),p.24f.
3. R.Ghirshman, Iran,p.160
4. E.F.Schmidt,Persepolis, Vol.II,p.55

the open country, some distance from the temples.[1] A word here in regards to the function of the Zendan-i-Suleiman building would be in order.[2] Some scholars, such as Herzfeld and Parrot, tend to maintain that the building must have served as a tomb. Others, such as Erdmann and Ghirshman, maintain that the building was used as a fire-temple. Stronach, however, disagrees with both, and suggests that the building was probably the "sanctuary" which Gaumata the "Magian" had destroyed, and which we are told Darius restored. Be that as it may, we can at least speak of two "fire-temples" if not three.

Now comes the question of Gaumata's, or for that matter, Darius's "sanctuaries." Similarly, there was the incidence of Xerxes's destruction of the "sanctuary" of the daevas. Were there sanctuaries, or were there not, as Herodotus informs us? In the absence of any positive evidence, I can only suggest that the "Magian-Medes" had no sanctuaries, as Herodotus confirms, and therefore being opposed to such

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1. D.Stronach, "Excavations at Pasargadae," Iran, Vol.III (1965), p.24.
2. Ibid. p.14-17.

and wishing to injure the Persians at large, Gaumata destroyed them. But when Darius took the power, he restored for the"Achaemenid-Persians," and the public at large probably, their "sanctuaries." Xerxes, on the other hand, wanted to eliminate from his empire the "daeva" worshipping sanctuary, (in accordance with the spirit of Zarathustra ?), and in its place "where previously the daevas were worshipped, there he worshipped Ahuramazda and Arta."[1] The "Achaemenid-Persians" then did have "fire-temples" and "sanctuaries," while the "Magian-Medes" did not. Similarly, the "Achaemenid-Persians" did have images of Ahura Mazda, and that as early as the reign of Cyrus. This is how Stronach describes the cylinder seal discovery at Cyrus's capital, Pasargadae:

> "Beneath a moon symbol,[2] we see a king or hero engaged in combat with a lion while the winged figure of Ahuramazda hovers above a large spoked wheel. ...the figure of Ahuramazda is without the sun disc that often encircles his body ..."[3]

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1. R.G.Kent, Old Persian,p.151(XPh lines 35-41).
2. Is this possibly the "Moon-god" that Herodotus mentioned?
3. D.Stronach, "Excavations at Pasargadae," Iran, Vol.I,(1963), p.39-41.

This, plus the bas-reliefs above the royal Achaemenian tombs, plus the bas-reliefs of Behistun, and the bas-reliefs of the certain monuments at Persepolis, all show the winged figure of Ahura Mazda. We can safely conclude then that the "Achaemenid-Persians" did make images of their god.

2. Sacrificial Rite - He who offers sacrifice, according to Herodotus, makes no libation, nor uses music, but goes up to the highest mountain leading the "victim" (animal ?) to a clean piece of ground, and invokes the god.[1] No sacrifice was to be offered without the ministrations of a "Magian," who stood by the sacrifice singing over it an ode concerning the origin of the gods.[2] But, in reading further, we find that Herodotus portrays a different picture in regards to sacrifice and libation.

> "Then they (Xerxes and his army) came to the river Scamander;... whilst he was there, Xerxes went up to the Citadel of Priam, having a desire to see it, and was told of all that had happened there, he sacrificed a thousand oxen to

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1. Herodotus I.131,132.
2. Ibid. I.131,132.

> Athene of Ilium, and the Magians poured libations to the heroes..."[1]

And on a different occasion:

> "as the sun showed over the horizon, Xerxes poured a libation into the sea from a golden cup ..."[2]

Three differences at least can be noticed in these accounts of Herodotus: no libation offered versus the offering of libation; no rite performed without a "Magian" versus Xerxes himself offering a rite; place of worship to be mountain top versus place of worship by the water. Two of these arguments can be refuted on the following grounds: since Herodotus does not specify the mountain heights as the only exclusive place for sacrifice, then the water side, or any other place, may be just as suitable to offer a sacrifice; again, since the account of Xerxes's offering the rite does not specifically mention the presence or absence of a "Magian," we may assume that this being a method in terminology only points the central figure of Xerxes,

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1. Herodotus VII.43
2. Ibid. VII.54

and the ritual was either performed by Xerxes himself, or performed by "priests" (Achaemenid or Median ?) and attributed to him because he so ordered the rite. But what are we to make of the "contradictory" statement of Herodotus regarding the offering of libation? Was a libation offered or not? The answer to this question is not either a positive or a negative answer, but both. For in reality, there is no "contradiction" at all - if only one can separate the "Magian-Medes" from the "Achaemenid-Persians." Then , our question is wrongly posed, and it should rather be: who offered libation and who did not? In the one instance Herodotus is describing the rites of the "Magian-Medes," who made no libations, while in the other he is speaking of the "Achaemenid-Persians," who we noticed practiced their tradition the "haoma" cult, to which Zarathustra was strongly opposed. Besides, from the texts discovered in the archives at Persepolis, we learn that the "Persian-priests" prepared this intoxicating drink from a plant, to be used for rituals; and the texts give the detail of the profits made from its sale.[1] Further support

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1. E.F.Schmidt, Persepolis, Vol.II.

comes from the actual mortar and pestle, used for "haoma," found in Persepolis. Thus the "Achaemenid-Persians" made libations while the "Magian-Medes" did not.

3. Burial Rite - Herodotus's account clearly indicates the "Persian" versus the "Magian" custom of disposal of the dead.[1] In contradistinction to the "Persians," who treated the corpse with wax and then covered it with earth, the "Magian" exposed all corpses to be torn by wild birds and beasts of prey. The Spring Cemetery of Persepolis and the Achaemenian rock-tombs present this evidence of "Persian" burial custom. Here is what Schmidt has to say:

> "Twenty four of the thirty one bodies, whose remains we found, have been buried in adjustable earthenware coffins which consist of two distinct sections; ... were covered with slightly domed lids made of the same coarse and brittle earthenware; ... all lids were crushed by the weight of rubble-filled earth and boulders, which in many instances no doubt had been deposited intentionally on top of the burials."[2]

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1. Herodotus I.140
2. E.F.Schmidt, Persepolis, Vol.II,p.117

From the pottery evidence, provided atb the site, Schmidt concludes that,

> "the cemetery of Persepolis Spring belongs either to the end of the Achaemenid period, or to the early post-Achaemenid era."[1]

The Achaemenid kings were the "Persians," and therefore adhered to their custom of burial. As kings, they were entitled, of course, to a more pompous ceremonial burial. Thus the tombs at Pasargadae and Behistun.

In conclusion, we must say that Herodotus has no "contradictory" statements or accounts, but rather interestingly enough demonstrates how the "Achaemenid-Persians" and the "Magian-Medes" (who both claimed the Indo-Aryan religious legacy) each preserved their own separate identity in the various phases of their religions. But religion and politics went hand in hand in the ancient East; and therefore their differences reflected, though in a very subtle way, both in their religious as well as in their

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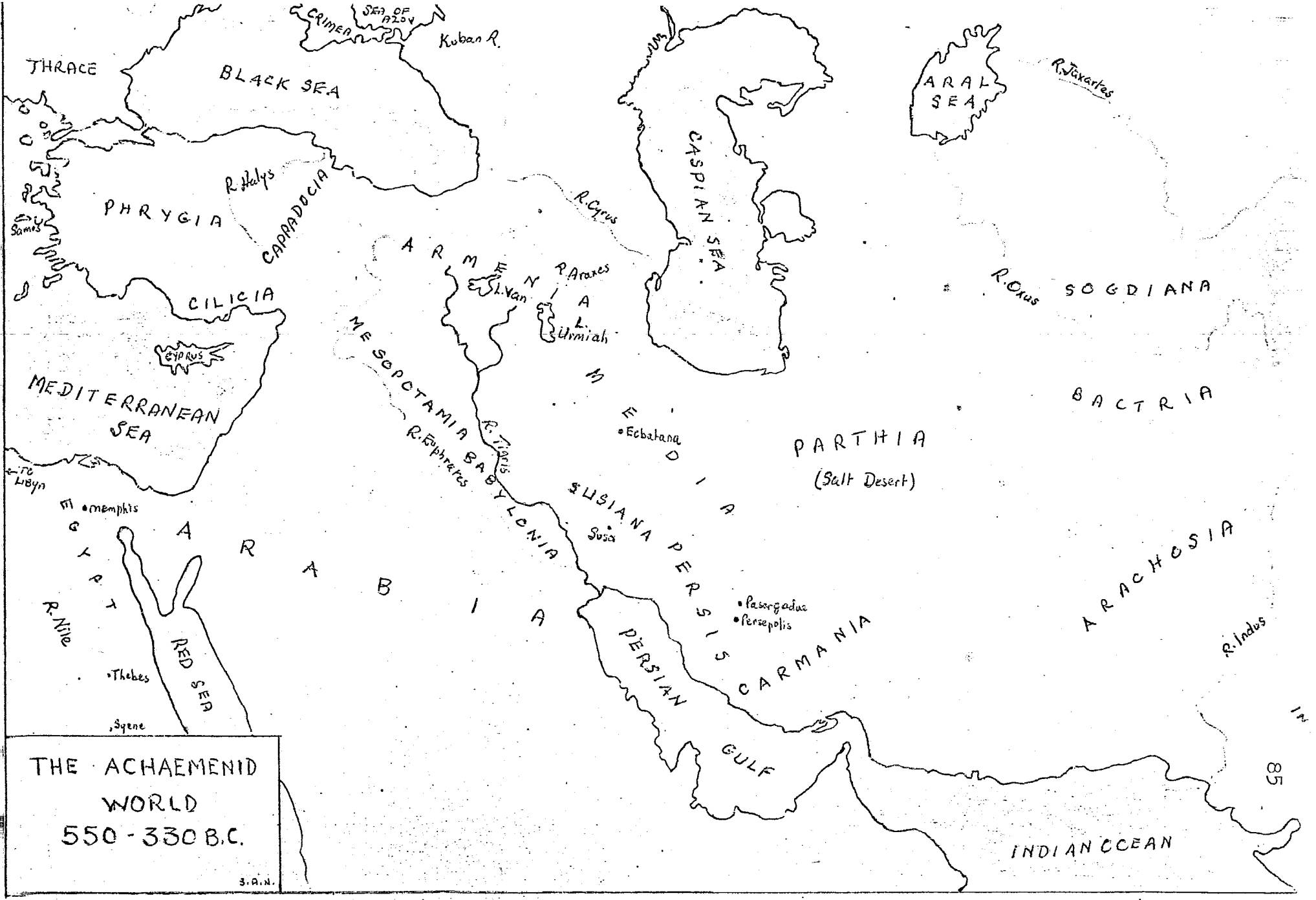
1. E.F.Schmidt, Persepolis, Vol.II,p.123

political spheres. Zarathustra, who was not welcomed in his own country, had moved south-westwards to the region where the Persians were established and whence they were soon to emerge as the great actors in the arena of world politics. If nothing else, his holding of Ahura Mazda to the fore-front had found receptive ears among the "Achaemenid-Persians." But side by side with the "new" Zarathustrian movement remained the traditional pantheon and cult of the"Achaemenid-Persians"and the "Magian-Medes" - the Indo-Aryan legacy. However much Darius's religious opinions seemed to have been approximated to those of the prophet Zarathustra, and however zealous Xerxes may have been in his suppression of the cult of "daevas," the resurgence of other deities from Artaxerxes II's reign onwards only proves that the older Indo-Aryan religious legacy had continued to exist. Thus, three Indo-Aryan religious "threads" - the Zarathustrians, the Magian-Medes and the Achaemenid-Persians - co-existed during the Achaemenid empire. The result was the re-emergence of a strictly dualistic form of "Zoroastrianism" some six centuries later (Sassanian period), which was probably due to the process of modification and

syncretism by the "Magian-Medes, the "Achaemenid-Persians," and the "Zarathustrians."


THRACE
BLACK SEA
CRIMEA
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R. Halys
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CAPPADOCIA
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MEDITERRANEAN SEA
R. Cyrus
ARMENIA
R. Araxes
L. Van
L. Urmiah
CASPIAN SEA
ARAL SEA
R. Jaxartes
R. Oxus
SOGDIANA
BACTRIA
MESOPOTAMIA
R. Euphrates
R. Tigris
BABYLONIA
MEDIA
Ecbatana
PARTHIA
(Salt Desert)
SUSIANA
Susa
PERSIS
CARMANIA
ARACHOSIA
R. Indus
Pasargadae
Persepolis
PERSIAN GULF
INDIAN OCEAN
memphis
EGYPT
ARABIA
R. Nile
RED SEA
Thebes
Syene
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